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Homes for Heroes

This week the House approved an important bill to expand housing assistance and supportive services for homeless veterans.

The bill authorizes \$200 million in the current fiscal year to provide supportive housing and services for low-income veterans. Specifically, the bill authorizes grants to non-profit organizations and consumer co-operatives to expand the supply of permanent housing for low-income veterans and their families, and to provide supportive services. It would also allow veterans' families to continue to receive the assistance provided for in the bill in the event of the veteran's death.

The bill also expands the highly successful Department of Housing and Urban Development – Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing Program (HUD-VASH) by authorizing 20,000 rental vouchers annually and making the program permanent.

The bill requires HUD to create a position within the department to serve as the liaison to the Department of Veterans Affairs. The liaison would ensure that the owners of housing projects assisted under the bill have the managerial capacity to assess the service needs of residents, coordinate supportive services and tailor services to residents' individual needs.

The legislation also requires HUD to submit a comprehensive annual report to Congress on the housing needs of homeless veterans and the steps HUD has taken under the programs provided for in the bill.

In This Week's Issue:

- Homes for Heroes
- Boosting the G. I. Bill
- Reducing Greenhouse Gases

Boosting the G.I. Bill

This week I wrote to Gov. Michael Easley asking that he consider allowing all veterans to become honorary North Carolinians for the purpose of a college education.

This would mirror a plan announced earlier this week by Ohio Gov. Ted Strickland called the "G.I. Promise." Under the plan, Ohio will change residence requirements at the state's 36 colleges and universities

to allow all veterans, their spouses and dependents to attend Ohio colleges and universities at in-state tuition rates.

This program is the first of its kind in the nation and makes all veterans "honorary Ohioans" for the purpose of a college education. If adopted in North Carolina, it would enhance the Military Support Act signed into law by Gov. Easley in 2005.

This would be in keeping with our status as America's most military- and veteran-friendly state. And, it would send a clear message to veterans that North Carolina wants them and that we believe they would be valuable students with immense potential."

Last month, a new G.I. bill was signed into law. The bill doubles college benefits for eligible troops and veterans, essentially guaranteeing full scholarships at in-state public colleges or universities, and provides monthly housing stipends. But generally under the new law, veterans can attend college only in their home states.

According to the most recent statistics available through the U.S. Census Bureau, there are more than 23.7 million veterans living across the country including 756,000 in North Carolina. An estimated 174,000 of North Carolina's veterans served after the start of the first Gulf War on August 2, 1990.

Reducing Greenhouse Gases

This week the House Committee on Energy's Subcommittee on Energy and Air Quality held a hearing dealing with the Carbon Capture and Storage Early Deployment Act.

Carbon Capture and Storage (CSS) is the process of separating and injection carbon dioxide from coal-fired electricity generators into underground geologic formations for long-term storage. CCS represents a key technological pathway towards reducing greenhouse gas emissions from large stationary sources.

This bipartisan bill calls for fossil-based electricity distribution utilities to hold a referendum on the question of establishing a fee-based corporation that would advance the technology. If established, this budget-neutral entity would raise roughly \$1 billion per year to fund projects that demonstrate CCS projects at a commercially-scalable size.

At the start of the hearing, I made the following opening remarks:

This legislation is ideal for our current political climate and I applaud my Chairman for his vision and leadership.

The struggle to enact economy-wide climate change policy is well-documented. Despite what I view as irrefutable evidence, there remains a current of skepticism and doubt regarding the need for immediate action on climate change legislation, and this will continue to delay us from our task of generating policies that will signal the public and private world alike that a greener future is inevitable.

Despite this, we can take meaningful steps to ramp up technological innovation and deployment, such as the bill we are considering today.

Further, the authors of this legislation wisely understand that creating a greener future will require transition from our current energy infrastructure to the next. Coal, which is abundant and inexpensive in the United States, must be a part of that transition. Coal is responsible for over half of the electricity generated in the United States, and is especially critical to the Southeast.

It is prolific in its utility, and carbon capture and storage will provide a useful tool in transitioning coal into a greener fuel stock for years to come. It is imperative that we encourage its development as well as its proliferation at a commercial level as soon as possible.

I applaud my colleagues for their bipartisan support of this legislation. I hope that we can see this type of collegiality as we continue to address climate change policy, and it will require an attitude of compromise from everyone.

I want to welcome all of our witnesses, but I extend a special welcome to a fellow North Carolinian, Mr. James Kerr, the Commissioner of the North Carolina Utilities Commission. Mr. Kerr was born in Goldsboro, which is in my congressional district, and I am pleased that he is joining us today to offer his testimony on this legislation.

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